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SUBJECT: MUMBAI'S JEWISH COMMUNITY - SECURITY A NEW CONCERN A YEAR
AFTER THE ATTACKS

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1. (SBU) Summary: Since the 26/11 terrorist attacks, security awareness has risen within the dwindling Indian Jewish community. The attacks drew unwelcome attention to the community, and while no specific security threats have emerged, some Jewish leaders have requested increased police security measures at the local level. Within the community, there is a clear division between the Indian Jewish community and representatives of the Chabad organization, who were the victims of the 26/11 attack. Though real concerns over security remain, Chabad is still active in Mumbai and receives around 100 Jewish visitors each week. Overall, the Indian Jewish community tries to keep a low profile, and hopes that its peaceful relationships with Muslim and Hindu neighbors will limit its exposure to attacks from extremists. End summary.

The Jewish Community in Mumbai

2. (U) Jewish communities have lived in India for almost 2,000 years. The Bene Israel and Baghdadi Jew communities are found primarily in Mumbai and Maharashtra, while the Cochin Jews have traditionally lived in the southern state of Kerala. Indian Jews have traditionally been a fully-integrated minority community; the Bene Israel community, which was officially recognized by the Israeli Rabbinate in 1964, is virtually indistinguishable from other residents. Since India's independence, however, most of the Jewish community has emigrated to Israel or other foreign countries. Of the estimated 45,000 Indian Jews at the time of independence, approximately 5,000 remain, with 60 percent of those in the Mumbai area of Maharashtra, and most speak Marathi as their native tongue. Accordingly, this small community is largely elderly, close-knit, and struggling to maintain its religious traditions and synagogues.

Security and 26/11

13. (SBU) In several meetings with Jewish community members, most agreed that the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in November 2008 (known in India as "26/11") brought the community closer, especially as the attacks drew unwanted attention to the Indian Jewish community. However, Sofer Solomon, Chairman of the Sir Jacob Sassoon Charity and Allied Trusts, claimed that many felt the attacks on the Chabad representatives at Nariman House were intended as attacks on Israel, not the Indian Jewish community. (Note: Two terrorists occupied Nariman House, the headquarters of the Brooklyn-base Chabad organization which offers orthodox religious services and kosher meals to Jews, especially traveling Israelis. Six people were killed there, including three Israeli-Americans. End note.) Jonathan Solomon, Chair of the Indian Jewish Federation, emphasized the threat on the community in India comes from external, not internal, forces. His synagogue is located within a Muslim locality and has very good relations with his Indian Muslim neighbors.

14. (SBU) In discussions with Congenoffs, Jewish leaders acknowledged that they knew of no security threats to the community. Nevertheless, after the attacks, many Mumbai Jewish leaders wrote to their local police stations to request police protection for their communities and synagogues. In some instances, police responded quickly to assess security and provide some enhanced security measures. In Sofer Solomon's opinion, the 26/11 attacks forced the Indian police to acknowledge potential threats against the Jewish community. In other localities, however, according to Jewish leaders, the police declined to provide additional security, explaining that Jews were not a recognized minority that requires police protection. Some police protection units asked for names and copies of identity cards of Jewish community members in order to access certain synagogues. Jewish leaders refused, insisting

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that synagogues remain open and welcoming places of worship. In addition, they feared that given the high levels of corruption in the police, that information could easily be disseminated.

Chabad, Nariman House, and Security

15. (SBU) After the attacks, the Chabad organization in Brooklyn sent several rabbinical students back to Mumbai in order to maintain a presence in the city after the tragedy, and to determine whether, and under what conditions, the center should be re-established. Chabad created a new center in a residential apartment building, staffed by rotating temporary personnel until a married rabbi can be found to lead the center. Information concerning its location and staff is controlled; despite this, Chabad estimates that 100 Jewish visitors come to the Mumbai Chabad house each week for Chabad's daily kosher meals. Consulate Mumbai's Regional Security Office and the Israeli Consulate maintain regular contact with Chabad representatives, and consult with them on safety and security issues. Chabad is continuing to evaluate the feasibility of re-establishing their Mumbai center, and the future of Nariman House, which they would like to eventually re-open.

Chabad and the Indian Jews

16. (SBU) While the Chabad rabbis and the Indian Jewish community worshipped together and collaborated on issues of

community interest, Indian Jews expressed reservations about Chabad, and their presence in Mumbai. Chabad's orthodox practices differed from the conservative traditions of the Indian Jews; many Indian Jewish leaders told Congenoffs that they had never visited Nariman House. Moreover, members of the Indian Jewish community accused Chabad rabbis of attempting to establish another synagogue in southern Mumbai, pulling away many foreign Jews resident in or traveling through the city. This created tension, as the Indian Jewish community struggles to maintain membership in its six synagogues, and depends on foreign and visiting Jews for Minyan, the requirement to have 10 Jewish men for a prayer service and other religious practices. Chabad rabbis did agree to end this effort, and worship at the Keneseth Elyahoo Synagogue which is also managed by Sofer Solomon. After the 26/11 attacks, this synagogue was one of the first to get police protection. According to Solomon, Chabad's orthodox attire draws "dangerous attention" to the synagogue and the Indian Jewish community. While he and other members of the community do not enjoy keeping a low profile, they acknowledged that as a minority "that is how it works in India."

17. (SBU) The Israeli Consul General, Orna Sagiv, told Congenoffs that while her Consulate has made consistent efforts to help Chabad with its security, the Israeli government "cannot take responsibility for their security." Chabad's philosophy of remaining open and accessible to the Jewish community was one reason why Nariman House had taken few security measures. Now, Chabad recognizes the need for greater vigilance, but the organization still has a difficult time reconciling its security needs with its mission. The Israeli Consulate has limits on what it can do for Chabad - especially since it is an American organization, with mostly non-Israeli employees - and has encouraged them to consult with the American Consulate and the State Department in Washington as well. The Consul General lamented the divisions between the Indian Jewish and Chabad communities, and hoped that going forward, she would be able to continue to maintain balance between the two groups. (Note: The community had hoped to observe the anniversary of 26/11 quietly and privately, but, at the Israeli Embassy insistence, now plan to hold an ecumenical memorial service at the Keneseth Elyahoo Synagogue designed to honor all victims of the attacks. End Note.)

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18. (SBU) Comment: After 26/11, the small, declining Indian Jewish community is more alert to potential security threats. However, the community is still largely comfortable with its position as a deliberately low-key minority in India, and is proud of its peaceful relations with their Muslim and Hindu neighbors. The attacks brought the community closer, but also brought unwanted attention. With the return of the Chabad organization, there will likely continue to be minor tensions among these small communities, and fears that a more aggressive identifiably Israeli Jewish presence in the city will potentially expose the Indian Jewish community to attacks from extremists. End Comment.
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